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# The Death Detectives

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## Biographies

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**Steve Fuller** // is Auguste Comte Professor of Social Epistemology in the Department of Sociology at the University of Warwick. The author of twenty books, his most recent work focuses on the future of humanity. He has two new books being published this year: Knowledge: The Philosophical Quest in History (Acumen) and, with Veronika Lipinska, The Proactionary Imperative: A Foundation for Transhumanism (Palgrave).

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**Martina Caruso** // is an art historian, writer and curator. Since completing her PhD at the Courtauld Institute of Art she has developed research interests in the history and theory of photography as well as modern and contemporary Italian art. She teaches at London College of



Communication (University of the Arts London) and works as an art consultant for the Giulio Turcato Archives in Rome. Her forthcoming book *Italian Humanist Photography from Fascism to the Cold War* will be published by Bloomsbury in 2016.

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**Matthew Gieve** // is a researcher and consultant at the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations. He graduated in politics and philosophy and holds a Masters in psychoanalytic theory from University College London. He works in applied social research across a wide range of fields, centering on issues of social exclusion with a particular focus on children and families and on mental health.

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**Anthony Luvera** // is an Australian artist, writer and educator based in London. He is Course Director of BA (Hons) Photography at Coventry University. His photographic work has been exhibited widely in galleries, public spaces and festivals, including the British Museum, London Underground's Art on the Underground, National Portrait Gallery London, Belfast Exposed Photography, Australian Centre for Photography, Malmö Fotobiennial, Brighton Photo Fringe, PhotoIreland and Les Rencontres D'Arles Photographie. His writing appears regularly in a wide range of publications, - including Photoworks, Source and Photographies. Anthony also facilitates workshops and gives lectures for the public education programmes of the National Portrait Gallery, The Photographers' Gallery, and Barbican Art Gallery.

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**Angela Eden** // works as an organisation consultant using psychoanalytic ideas to inform her work with individuals, teams and organisations. She uses a relational model of work in a wide variety of sectors including health and social care. Her original training as an English and Drama teacher, led to community and economic development. She studied at

LSE, the Tavistock Centre, the Institute of Group Analysis and is a Board member of the International Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organisations (ISPSO). She also uses writing and art as part of creative practice.

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**Philip Stokoe** // Philip Stokoe is a Psychoanalyst (Fellow of the Institute of Psychoanalysis) in private practice working with adults and couples, and an Organisational Consultant, providing consultation to a wide range of organisations. He was a Consultant Social Worker and Senior Lecturer in the Adult Department of the Tavistock & Portman NHS Foundation Trust between 1994 and 2012. He was the Clinical Director of the Adult Department from 2007 to 2011. He has a reputation as a successful teacher and has taught and written about the application of psychoanalysis in a wide range of settings; Supervision, Leadership, Groups, Organisations, Ethics, Borderline Disorder, Adolescence, Residential Work, Working with victims of Sexual Abuse, Psychological Services in the NHS, Couple Relationships, and Politics.

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**Elizabeth Cotton** // is a writer and educator working in the field of mental health at work. She teaches and writes academically about employment relations and precarious work, business and management, adult education, solidarity and team working, and resilience at work. She blogs as [www.survivingwork.org](http://www.survivingwork.org) and @survivingwk and runs the Surviving Work Library, a free resource for working people on how to do it. She writes a bi-monthly column for [theconversation.com](http://theconversation.com) Battles on the NHS Frontline - looking at the realities of working life in health and social care sectors.

//

Encadrement perspectomètre perpendiculaire au sol, d'un relief de 30 centimètres, divisé par plans horizontaux équidistants de 5 avec graduation donnant la valeur correspondante du centimètre. — Pour percevoir la profondeur: placer l'œil à 15 centimètres de l'image en fixant le point de croisement des lignes  $V_1V_2$  et  $H_1H_2$ .

Paris, le 19.....





# *The Death Detectives: An Introduction*

## Elizabeth Cotton

The Death Detectives event took place at The Photographers' Gallery in London on the 3rd December 2015 - an event to talk about, urm, death. This was the fastest selling event in the Gallery's history, something you would not have put money on. Since when did a bunch of psychoanalytically minded folk staring into the abyss attract such a crowd?

Freud talked about the practice of psychoanalysis as like the work of a detective. Fragments and remains - unconscious and conscious - offer us evidence for the stories of our lives that have become obscured. Investigating the details of the psychic crime scenes a way to uncover our reality.

Forensic photography, like psychoanalysis, aimed to develop a protocol - the rules by which photography can be considered factual and providing evidence. The scientific nature of such protocols is contested terrain in both photography and psychoanalysis, whether links can be made between the forensic details to the now hidden course of events.

Walking through the Burden of Proof exhibition, the parallels between psychoanalysis and forensic photography are striking.

The father of forensic photography, Alphonse Bertillon, working as head of photography for the Paris police force, developed the first protocol for systematically recording the crime scene - using a technique of Photographie Metrique. Using a tripod to take a bird's eye view, the victim is placed in the middle of the picture, with the details of the scene all given equal attention. A non-judgemental perspective. The photographs are surrounded by a metric ruler, to measure the relative distance between these details. This includes a

simulated wooden 'sill' at the bottom of the page, a tender attempt to formally frame the crime, to contain the violence of the images within.

This forensic perspective speaks to the position of the patient under the analytic microscope. Sometimes experienced as a cold autopsy, the blood and guts of the psychic investigation. Analyst as pathologist. While at the same time the objectivity of the protocol creating a space for a benign observer, someone to coolly make sense of the psychically raw data.

In the next room of the Burden of Proof exhibition is the abstract work of Rodolphe Reiss - Bertillon's student - who set up the first forensic school at the neutral University of Lousanne. The images in this section are close up abstract images of the details of crime scenes. A blood splatter on white fabric, a folded handkerchief, scratches on a dark floor. For such scientific images they profoundly draw the viewer in - demanding us to understand them.

This attention to detail is paralleled in psychoanalysis - the insistence on the significance of the small things. That a mark on the body or a dream, if interpreted can uncover real meaning in the world. They are both systems that accept the truth of the details and their relevance to understanding the human story behind them.

This is a further link between forensic photography and psychoanalysis, the necessity of the detective's work for us to interpret and make sense of the details as part of a bigger picture. The proposal of the Death Detectives is that however factual the data is, ultimately it requires interpretation. Someone always has to understand what is being shown. This is a profoundly humanistic view, where we are dependent on each other to do this detective work of knowing and understanding reality, including the certainty of death. A human story pieced together by other humans.

This event took place just three weeks after the Paris shootings. The political and social crisis that November 13th is part of came close to the world of photography, happening at the time of Paris Photo, with many people from the photography world including staff from The Photographers' Gallery were there. The exhibition itself was curated in France - coming out of a powerful French intellectualism, unafraid of conceptualism and complexity. This position that promotes ideas and their everyday use to understand human experience is one that we should cherish.

The Death Detectives event and the eBook that accompanies it, is motivated by the belief that by allowing the knowledge of death into our lives we can live life more fully. Together.

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# *Do Not Go Gentle Into that Good Night*

David Morgan

*Do not go gentle into that good night,  
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.  
Though wise men at their end know dark is right,  
Because their words had forked no lightning they  
Do not go gentle into that good night.  
Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright  
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.  
Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,  
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,  
Do not go gentle into that good night.  
Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight  
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.  
And you, my father, there on that sad height,  
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.  
Do not go gentle into that good night.  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.*

Dylan Thomas, *Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night* (1951)

I want to tell you a story about how the struggle between life and death forces appear in an analyst's consulting room.

I have found through my work as a psychoanalyst that we all work unconsciously to distort and blunt our acceptance of profound human



experiences such as death but that traumatic events may destine some people unconsciously to devote all their efforts to subvert the recognition of these facts as an activity in place of living.

Roger Money-Kyrle psychoanalyst and philosopher, wrote that it is useful to consider three core facts of life which are; “the recognition of dependency , the recognition of a couple creating life as a profound creative act, and the recognition of the inevitability of time and ultimately death”.

He went on to say about this third ‘fact’ that “to fear death is not the same as to recognize its inevitability, which is a fact forced on us much against our will by the repeated experience that no good (or bad) experience can ever last for ever—a fact perhaps never fully accepted”.

We are all defended against the painful recognition of these facts. However poor our experiences may have been, we must all have had some experience of nurturing and we are all the products of a procreative union that made us but inevitably excluded us. We lose love and hope and struggle to re-find it and we all fear exclusion and ultimately the exclusion that comes through death. It is only perhaps as we grope our way to understanding that good and nurturing experiences are all transient in reality but must be kept alive psychically that any of us are able to experience hope for ourselves and others.

My work leads me to believe that it is the process of the analyst bearing to face these facts afresh for themselves whilst bombarded with death-fear and resistance in the transference that may begin to allow inklings of digested realisation to be taken in by the other.

## A clinical story

The personal details of this story are disguised to protect anonymity and the person who agreed to my using her material also now lives abroad.

I want to talk about the difficulties of managing as a psychoanalyst when working with people whose grasp on life is tenuous and who unconsciously enact and provoke enormous concerns particular for themselves and their families. Also to think about whether it is possible or worthwhile to live in the "shadow of death" that some people work strenuously to remain under.

Rebecca was a bright and successful medic. She had become depressed and incapacitated in her work, socially isolated within the confines of her flat, and she was very lonely. She had tried to cope with this situation by becoming more involved with her work but looking after others didn't help and she felt unable to continue.

The intellectual defenses that she had employed to get on and be successful in her life so far, including migrating from another country, speaking another language and excelling in exams, were beginning to fail her.

She had also begun seriously to lose weight. She informed me that she had recently begun to frighten herself whilst alone in her flat, having hallucinations of her dead mother in the back garden looking in through the window at her.

She also imagined black birds flying through her flat. This felt both genuine, but accompanied by a memory of wanting to jump into her mother's grave after her premature death.

In this melodramatic account of her state of mind it was possible to see both real feelings of pain and loneliness but also some evidence of her exciting herself over death. One way of managing the fear of it is to create horror movies. It's shy young people like the horror genre. An inner deathliness was

in danger of taking her over. Despite my instant reaction of alarm about her weakened state and a hopelessness about her, I decided to see her.

Rebecca had some traumatic experiences that left their capacity to manage the fear of loss of love and death disabled. In turn I felt myself also to be similarly disabled at times, and I was forced to begin with to live as they had done with visions of the chasm. As my work developed understanding these fears in relation to my patients' unconscious life played its part in enabling me to provide a more or less adequate container for my her, and enabled her to begin to think and feel about these facts of life as they had not dared to before.

Rebecca was not from this country. She was the fourth child in a family of seven. Her mother developed breast cancer around the patient's fifth birthday and this involved her being away for extensive treatments in a city some distance from the family home.

Her mother's anxiety for her children seemed lead her as often happens to emphasise the need for her children to get on and make the most of their academic prowess. There was a strong family history of cancer and there had been several deaths. At least passing exams gives a semblance of control over things.

It was a feature of the early months that she had many colds and flus, which she seemed to catch easily and hold onto. She always looked cold and weak and as if she needed to wear more clothes which evoked in me an interesting state of mind, one of exasperation at her helplessness, rather than concern about her self neglect over time I came to understand these early feelings of mine were related to her relationship with a mother who simply had no capacity to take care of her and who wanted her to take care of herself.

I initially found seeing her rather draining, as presumably, Her mother had found looking after her family draining when she needed to be looked after herself.

At an early age she was sent to a boarding school, following in the footsteps of her sisters. Throughout her time there she did well academically whilst at the same time managing to be rebellious.

Her mother did die after a long struggle when Rebecca was 20. This tragically was closely followed by her father's death after only six months. It seemed that he couldn't survive mother's passing. Rebecca responded to all this by working hard academically.

Rebecca's history showed very considerable emotional privation and there had clearly been a divorce between her work-self and her emotions.

I think this dynamic is a part of working with many people who fill up the dark holes in their lives by distancing them from any need for others by creating relationships with substances, things, ideas that obviate the need for dangerous love, and it's corollary vulnerability, indeed they often create loss and pain in the people around them whilst they pursue preoccupations that fill them their minds and bodies, whilst the real person is excluded and diminished.

In our second meeting she told me that in her view she would be unable to conceive of getting help from me and continuing to work. Instead she had been looking at advertisements to become a street cleaner for her local borough, this cleaning up other peoples' stuff evolved from an unconscious phantasy of cleaning other people's mess up rather than dealing with her own.

She posed a dilemma as I did think it was reasonable for her to consider not working whilst she was clearly in such a vulnerable state. On the other hand, she had no financial cushion to fall back on. Her alternative job choice was evidently dangerous as it was then the middle of winter and her current physical health was very fragile.

I was confronted immediately by my reactions to her depleted mental and physical states. I began to realise that she was insistently bringing the reality

of death and deadly states into my room. To manage this first dilemma of life and death, I could only fall back on my theory and the setting..

I was in no position to make decisions for her my task was just to try and see how she responded to our working together. I said that "she seemed to find it difficult to conceive of both getting help and helping herself; it seemed that it had to be one or the other."

Again, I came to see this as a re-enactment of the experience being with a mother who could not help. She was forever tempted to regress to infantile dependency in order, I think, to try to find someone to depend on. With great difficulty she continued to work. The pattern of her employment followed a similar path, in that she would often feel over-burdened and expected to do too much.

The first two years of our work was quite harrowing. It seemed that I had to live with her within the anxiety that she might die. She was deeply depressed, always with a cold, had very little money and was without any apparent social or family contacts.

The first dream she ever brought seemed to be a fairly accurate representation of her internal state.

"I am standing on a stage and I am overlooking a swimming pool full of dead male bodies. They had all died due to some mysterious disease and seemed to be floating horrible substance. In the distance a little boat is coming toward me that is picking up the dead bodies."

Rebecca was unable to think or say more about this powerful dream but I was able to use it to help me understand more about her. I kept in mind the waters seemed to be a negative version of "the waters of the unconscious", "dangerous waters" in which you don't swim.

I saw the dead people as symbols of her frozen, dissociated emotions, especially feelings, which seemed to have been annihilated. That they were



men seemed significant. I felt her identification with her dying mother had left her with the sense that she herself was deadly. The boat, I thought might be seen as an ego, or the hope of a thinking ego that might develop, and that might “pick up” i.e. understand her dead, frozen self. I wondered if I might be partly represented by the boat, but It was a daunting task. This ‘aid’ in her mind clearly came with the price of risk of very severe contamination.

At the time I interpreted to her that the dream seemed to indicate her fear that her mind and thoughts would be lethal to anyone who came into contact with her, particularly men including me. She lived in fear of repelling me and the men she began to meet.

Another dream later in our work shows, I think, how Rebecca was beginning to use our work.

“I am lying on a bed on the side of a partition, on the other side of which is an old nun on a trampoline who is jumping up and down, trying to see over at me.”

By this time we were able to think together about this view of a rather frustrated, possibly celibate person excitedly trying to reach her. The nun seemed to me clearly to be a reference to her own celibate perhaps child like self, but it could also be an unflattering attack on me, her analyst, as a celibate impotent person, which in this phase I often felt myself to be. But we could not ignore the manifest shape of the dream in which someone was jumping up and down to see something and in the manner of dreams this, I felt, was her becoming excited about being close to someone who at least seemed to be interested to see her, even if she had to turn them into an old nun or herself into a sexless being.

Over time her conception of herself as a lethal being began to emerge. I would say that she brought her deadness for the first time to someone who she hoped might convert it into thought and life.

There was some illness at one point and this forced us both to confront her mortal (as well as now sexual) body, and after considerable work this led her into engaging with her own and my mortality as real things to be thought about.

This brought in turn grief for her mother and father's deaths.

This seemed to me to come from a recognition of Money-Kyrle's facts of life. namely that she was the result of a procreative act and that she had somewhere inside her knowledge of something good that they had given her before they cruelly died.

### Bearing the facts of life

At times her fear for me joined with my own fear for me and us and I would mirror her in finding thought about our mortality overwhelming. Again, I depended on the setting and my own analytic perspective to help us.

At times she experienced real terror that if we talk about death the inevitable happens. It was of vital importance at these times that I was prepared to entertain the uncomfortable idea of my own death and my own limitations. It was an exploration of my capacity to cope with the thought of death and dying without defensively interpreting this fear away, or reassuring her, or indeed expiring on the spot.

This question about life and death became the focus of a great deal of exploration with me.

How do I, an older man, live with the knowledge of my own mortality, a reasonable question for someone whose own people seemed to have been dogged by and succumbed to such fears all her life?

This exploration of my capacity to cope with her streams of emotion about my death was an important ongoing aspect of her analysis.

As I survived, her ambivalence towards life abated and her fear that I would reject her increased. We could see this perhaps, to quote early Freud, as "hysterical misery turned to common unhappiness".

For these sorts of people the facts of life are intolerable as they have never experienced a mind able to think about long enough rather than succumb to their power of these facts.

This left her in a world where she could only enact their problems. It was essential with both that she was eventually able to manage terrors around the fear of death and disintegration so that these frightening thoughts could become symbolised in the patients' own material.

As a human I know that I struggle too at times to accept the three facts of life particularly the last one. The tool that I make use of is my belief in psychoanalysis. We all need mental space like Rebecca in which to deal with them.

"Rage against the dying of the light!!"

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# *The Timing of Death: Before its Time, Long Overdue or Just in Time?*

Steve Fuller

A key issue in the forensics of death is the timing of death. CSI-style television programs tend to presume that the death under investigation has occurred 'before its time' and hence is likely to have been the result of a crime. The overall effect of this initial judgement is to raise the value of the deceased person's life – especially in terms of its unrealized potential. Indeed, people's long-term reputations are very much affected by the perceived timing of their death -- and the extent to which it arrested an 'unrealized potential'. Thus, we speak of (usually but not always) younger people as 'cut down in their prime'. But equally, and perhaps more interestingly, people's reputations may suffer because, so to speak, they outstay their welcome among the living by failing either to remain brilliant or diminish gracefully. A good current case in point may be James D. Watson, youthful co-discoverer of DNA's double-helix structure, who in later life has tried to leverage his expertise in genetics to make periodic interventions in public debates that have been widely received as 'racist'.

That the value of a person's life may increase with early death and diminish with late death is routine in the post-mortem judgements we make of 'creative' people. The paradigm case is the English Romantic poets, some of whom died at thirty and others at eighty. The reputations of the longer-lived poets (Coleridge, Wordsworth) suffered, whereas those of the shorter-lived poets (Keats, Shelley) benefitted. The former are stigmatized for having become more reactionary, whereas the latter are presumed to have possessed unfulfilled promise – even though with age they too might have become reactionary. In my own field of sociology, the great Max Weber was spared the reputational fate of his equally clever rival Werner Sombart, who lived twenty years longer than Weber -- just in time to endorse the Nazi regime. In our own



time, the radical glow that continues to surround Michel Foucault is abetted by his death in 1984, just before the neo-liberalism towards which he was already inching came to acquire a hegemonic grip on the world-order. Had he lived another twenty years, Foucault might have come to be reviled as the intellectual godfather of the 'quantified self'.

Might human relations not be improved if we could think in terms of an *optimal* moment of death for which we and others might plan, eventuating in every death becoming a 'suicide' in the strict sense? Indeed, might there not be an art to the timing of one's death – to go out with a bang, not a whimper, as it were? To be sure, there is a classical tone to these questions. After all, the Roman Stoic Seneca held that as soon as the quantity of life outstrips its quality, suicide becomes an option. The appeal of this maxim is perhaps most naturally understood in terms of the prospect of living an increasingly degraded life, say, through debilitating illness or even declining socio-economic status. However, in the future, as we come to live longer, healthier lives – perhaps indefinitely – we may be simply left with too much time on our hands, such that what now may look like a life of endless leisure turns out in practice to provide endless opportunities for reputational damage through mishaps and misjudgments.

Here it is worth recalling the *modus operandi* of one famous rational suicide in Seneca's sense. In the forensic treatment presented in *The Trial of Socrates*, the great latter-day American muckraker, I.F. Stone, concluded that Socrates deliberately took his own life both out of contempt for a democracy that would regard him as a national security threat and because he did not relish the prospect of ending his days as a decrepit old man under constant suspicion. Thus, Socrates wanted to make the denouement of his life appear as dramatic as possible – and of course succeeded, courtesy of Plato. In the future, the Socratic exit may be planned longer in advance, as improvements in ambient levels of health allow people to determine the exact moment of departure to ensure maximum impact. In this context, understanding the

mindset of today's suicide bombers would not go amiss. Looking ahead, ordinary acts of murder may even come to be routinely defended on grounds of euthanasia, if a physically fit but socially dysfunctional person refuses to make a graceful departure from the land of the living. In any case, the more brutal forms of political realism – as depicted in, say, the UK/US television series *House of Cards* – have long upheld this practice.

Clearly a value reorientation is required to take the idea of an optimal death seriously. For a start, death would have to be seen not as something that happens to you but something that you choose to happen. Immanuel Kant can be held responsible for launching this general sensibility. His 'categorical imperative' implies that any death that I would allow to others, I also allow to myself. Jean-Paul Sartre exploited this intuition when he held all of humanity responsible for the 1945 Allied bombing of Hiroshima, which meant that we must all be ready to face a nuclear death – to be sure, a default sentiment in the ensuing Cold War. However, such assertions of the voluntary nature of death have always had a faintly absurd quality to them, one raised to self-consciousness by Sartre's own Existentialist movement. After all, under normal circumstances we do not control the moment of our death, however much we may wish or feel compelled to take responsibility for it. The 1964 Stanley Kubrick film *Dr. Strangelove* unleashed the black comic potential of this premise to great effect.

Nevertheless, to claim that a death happened 'optimally' is to imply the prospect of just this level of control over life and death – specifically, that the value of the deceased's life might be enhanced by death more than by continuing to live. Inheritance law – and specifically the well-named 'last will and testament' – offers a first pass at the issues involved, given the well-documented intergenerational struggles over who is best fit to take collectively owned capital forward. However, these disputes have typically transpired in the context of preparing for inevitable but unpredictable succession. Nowadays we are countenancing a world in which a departure

planned the right way might increase the capital of all concerned – both the posthumous reputation of the deceased and the financial base of the collective enterprise in question. Here one might think of what the father of public relations, Edward Bernays, called a ‘tie-in’, namely, an event outside of one’s control that can be turned into an opportunity to boost one’s fortunes – in this case by legitimizing suicide or possibly euthanasia (formerly known as ‘murder’). After all, it worked for Socrates.

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PREFECTURE DE POLICE

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PHOTOGRAPHIE METRIQUE

A LA REDUCTION MOYENNE de  $\frac{1}{10}$

VUE D'EN HAUT

PRISE VERTICALEMENT A 1<sup>m</sup> 65 AU DESSUS DE  
(TIRAGE 0<sup>m</sup> 15)

# Affaire de Puteaux (Seine) Assassinat de M<sup>e</sup> Langlois

Paris, le 5 avril 1905

VALEUR en CENTIMETRE :

1 <sup>er</sup> Sur le sol	11 cm
2 <sup>e</sup> A 0 <sup>m</sup> 10 au dessus	10 cm
3 <sup>e</sup> A 0 <sup>m</sup> 15 au dessus	10 cm
4 <sup>e</sup> A 0 <sup>m</sup> 20 au dessus	9 cm
5 <sup>e</sup> A 0 <sup>m</sup> 25 au dessus	9 cm



Echelle millimétrique  
(grandeur nature)



# *Forensic Imaginary*

## Martina Caruso

In Eyal Weizman's edited volume *Forensis* (2014), which featured in The Photographers' Gallery exhibition *Burden of Proof: the Construction of Visual Evidence*, he speaks about the 'forensic imagination' as a space in which it is possible to creatively retrieve affects. Looking at the photographs and videos of death on display, I found myself trying to get away from what they represented and connect them to a different imaginary, perhaps indeed a forensic one.

While Diane Dufour, the co-curator, in a video interview plays a cautious game with the vocabulary she uses, never straying from the idea of 'representing forensics', it seems there is a mixture of wanting to challenge the idea of what might be acceptable to show in an art gallery space and, I think, an imperceptible sense of shame at the desacralising gesture this might imply. Dufour, cleverly avoiding the question of 'art' and 'non-art', remains faultless in her professionalism, quasi-forensic in her presentation of the 'facts' of the show, and yet because of this veneer there is an inability to acknowledge the strange, emotional, human undercurrents implied by such an exhibition about death.

Perhaps it is from this (projected?) sense of shame that I found myself filling in the gaps in my mind about death and making connections between the photographs and videos on the walls with art works I have seen elsewhere, a part of me wishing that they were what I was looking at instead.

Thierry De Duve wrote about the way in which non-art works (e.g. scientific photographs) tend to be legitimised in art institutions by comparing them with existing art works. In his article 'Art in the Face of Radical Evil' (*October*, Summer 2008), De Duve discusses Christian Caujolle's curatorial choice to exhibit one hundred portraits of victims of the Cambodian genocide at the 1997 Arles photography festival, *Les Rencontres photographique d'Arles*.



Because the photographs had been acquired by the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the MoMA curators and Caujolle unconsciously ended up creating a new 'aesthetic category – that of genocidal images'. In a way, the curators of *Burden of Proof* are doing something similar, while masking their desire to discuss the works as 'art'. As a result, perhaps unconsciously, I was unable to think of anything else but art and aesthetics while seeing the show, maybe in an effort to render the frustratingly forensic as subjective and private as possible.

My mind jumped from the US military aerial photographs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki after the bomb to thinking of Jananne Al-Ani's beautiful and eerie film stills from the video *Shadow Sites II* (2011). Al-Ani herself was influenced by Edward Steichen's early aerial reconnaissance photographs from the First World War over the trenches of the Western Front. The dehumanised perspective that an aerial view of a landscape offers is somehow akin to short-sightedness: it won't allow the viewer to engage with the gritty gory detail of people dying in the landscape, and looks instead more like an abstract expressionist painting. The vagueness of such a view allows for no knowledge of the pain and death suffered by civilians in such raids.

Some of the most beautiful works in the exhibition were by the Swiss forensic photographer Rodolphe A. Reiss. His details from crime scenes show close-ups of pieces of evidence: a dark glass bottle, marks on the floor, a footprint. Their simplicity is aesthetically attractive. For a moment I thought I might be looking at something else, not connected to murder and death, but to the everyday, to life. Instead of applying myself like a forensic detective trying to fill in the missing detail, I found myself looking for a *trompe-l'oeil* where there wasn't one, a symbolic meaning even. Larry Sultan and Mike Mandel's work *Evidence* (1975 -1977) came to mind, in which they appropriated work from scientific and governmental sources, and made them act as surreal, displaced, forensic evidence. I found myself seeking to undermine the concept of the exhibition through its artistic similars.

Even the German scientist Richard Helmer's creepy montages from 1985 which reconstitute Josef Mengele's face through his skull brought me back to an exhibition in Edinburgh where I saw Christine Borland's *Homme Double* (1997) sculptural project. Borland's work managed to transcend the forensic paradigm: she invited six sculptors to sculpt Mengele's head according to six contradictory descriptions of the man and six photographs taken many years apart. The resulting sculptures were, inevitably, different. Borland moved the realm of the objective and the scientific into the human, the inexact, the subjective. By placing his six slightly different heads, as busts on plinths, Borland allows for a phenomenological, three-dimensional experience of the forensic examination, in a way asking viewers to position themselves with regard to the doctor-murderer. None of these experiences or feelings can really emerge from the photographs, which as forensic evidence, are not allowed to be more than facts.

The photographs of Russians on death row under Stalin's Great Terror in the 1930s were a direct reminder of De Duve's critique of Caujolle's hotly debated curatorial choice to show the portraits of the victims of the Cambodian genocide in 1997. In his article, De Duve questions the humanist fallacy which assumes that every work of art, once accepted into an art institution, speaks of humanity, noting that this definition ignores the criminals and torturers, who are also a part of humanity. In the end, De Duve suggests that the responsibility to address the people in the photographs lies fully with the viewer in the case of genocidal images, since the victims had already been dehumanised into things beneath the photographer's gaze, even before they were killed.

In this way, he connects with Roland Barthes' writing on photography and death. Alexander Gardner's photograph of Lewis Payne in 1865, waiting to be executed, inspired Barthes' discussion in *Camera Lucida* of how every photograph, not just the photographs of the executed, 'tells me death in the

future' [...] Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe.' Barthes's argument, which values the emotional, poignant response to photography transforms the 'professional' forensic attitude into one of the forensic imagination, in which spending time alone with the gazes of those who were about to die opens up a strange world of longing, a longing to know who the people in those photographs were.

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# *This is the Life I Got Left*

## Matt Gieve

In the cult 1979 film *The Warriors*, Swan - the leader of the gang - and Mercy, his soon-to-be-girl, walk along a New York subway track having just escaped the police. After a series of jibes about her promiscuity Mercy confronts him:

*“Look, what do you got against me? You’ve been picking on me all night.”*

*“I don’t like the way you live’ he says, “I don’t think you can remember who you get on Friday and Saturday nights. I don’t think you can remember what they look like.”*

*“Sometimes I can and sometimes I can’t.” She replies, “Who gives a damn? I see what’s happening next door and down the block. Belly hanging down, five kids, cockroaches in the cupboard. I’ll tell you what I want. I want something now. This is the life I got left. You know what I mean? You get it Warrior, huh? Get it?”*

There are many limits on life but the most binding of these is time. Death gives life urgency. A sentiment encapsulated succinctly by the latter-day philosopher of excess, Drake in his 2011 single *The Motto*, where the motto is YOLO: You Only Live Once. Such is the urgency he uses and acronym to save time.

While YOLO has since become a hackneyed internet meme, an ironic hashtag: ‘just drank a full-fat Coke, YOLO’, it also captures a particular cultural attitude toward death. If we can assume Drake’s major preoccupation is not with the biological fact of mortality so much as the imperative this

gives to the living, then it can be read a rap version of the aphorism “you might be run over by a bus tomorrow.”

Death says don't leave it till later, do it now. This is the life I got left. You know what I mean?

I was reassured, for the purposes of this seeming a sufficiently high-brow piece, to find that YOLO is originally attributed to Goethe, appearing in his 1774 play *Clavigo*, as “Man lebt nur einmal in der Welt.” - One lives but once in the world – (or to give it the Drake treatment OLBOITW). It then made its way through various iterations, such as Mae West's longhand version “You only live once, but if you do it right, once is enough” (YOLOBIYDIROIE), to Drake, to whom it finally fell to bring some much needed simplicity (YOLO). It appears that this imperative to haste is something that people have felt in different historical times, that despite great differences in the way we live, some features of life may be shared: a reassuring communion over the ages?

Phillipe Aries, the great French social historian of death, argues not. Death, like life, is different now. And in fact it is one thing we've been getting worse at. Contrary to the prevailing direction of change over the last millennium, death has been getting wilder over time: transforming from the comparative comfort of the *tame death* in the early Middle Ages, through various configurations to the *forbidden* or *denied death* of today (or of the 1970s).

Aries points to a range of factors to explain this shift: To our waning familiarity with death, both forestalled by medicine and ever more private when it does occur; and to sweeping secularisation eroding a once impeccable confidence in life beyond death. Bound up with this, the consequences of scientific revolution, and in particular the insights of Darwin repositioning human kind within nature itself. The human now just so much one more animal, a biological organism with no soul to outlive its flesh. If it were not true before, nowadays we REALLY do only live once.

While this might address the question of *Only Living Once*, it does not fully speak to the question of who it is that is doing so? The final and crucial factor in our shifting experience of death is the emergence of the individual: the self in its modern form. This change has dual effects. First, the process of greater Individualisation starts to undermine a once assumed position in a greater shared continuity, though either family or clan, increasingly isolating the individual within the bounds of their own lifetime. Second, the emphasis on the individual-as-agent leads to what psychoanalyst Adam Phillips describes as the impossible Liberal ideal of self-authorship - the idea that our lives and our actions are or should be entirely of our own choosing. Adding pressure upon the individual to make the most of this most limited resource. The greatest sin now is to have not experienced, to have gone without. A duty that each person bears to themselves. Charging YOLO with ever greater urgency. The effect of this as Aries suggests, is the very modern possibility of one's life being felt to be a failure:

*“Today the adult experiences sooner or later -and increasingly it is sooner-the feeling that he has failed, that his adult life has failed to achieve any of the promises of his adolescence”.*

And this for Aries is why death has become so unspeakably frightening, as he puts it: “When people started fearing death in earnest, they stopped talking about it.”

The obvious irony of this circumstance is that, notwithstanding misfortune, we live longer now than ever before. We have, in Mercy's words, “more life left”. Yet we find ourselves in the peculiar position whereby death is at once further off and at the same time more imminent.

The risk is that urgency of too great an order may sabotage the full life it appears to recommend. That YOLO and the attitudes that underlie it are in



some ways self-defeating; by further stoking feelings of haste they provoke either a paralysis of choice or a frantic attempt to fulfil multiple possibilities to the detriment of all.

This paradox is foreshadowed in de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*:

*“It is strange to see with what feverish ardour the Americans pursue their own welfare, and to watch the vague dread that constantly torments them lest they should not have chosen the shortest path which may lead to it.*

Like these Americans, of whom I believe we are inheritors, it increasingly falls to us as individuals to trouble the question of what makes a good death, and in answering this, what makes a good life? In the face of fewer certainties and greater choice, where failure is felt to be a real risk, a better question may be what makes a *good enough life*?

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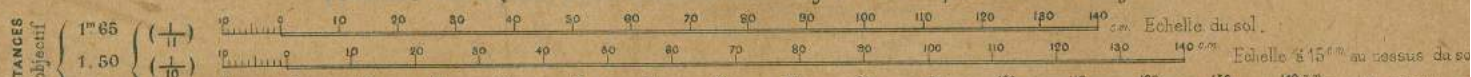
Paris, le 3 Octobre 1910



Sur l'encadrement: Graduation centimétrique divergente en grandeur réelle.

Modèle 161 (METHODE ALPHONSE BERTILLON)

ÉCHELLES MÉTRIQUES donnant la dimension vraie des lignes de front d'après leur distance à l'objectif.



# *Notes on Photography and Death: Mourning, Spectacle, Evidence*

Anthony Luvera

The inevitability and unpredictability of death is a fundamental part of what it means to be human. With much of the project of living spent seeking security and attempting to obtain and sustain control, it is the unknowingness of the timing and experience of death that makes it so confronting. Yet, attitudes to death are culturally constructed and coping mechanisms are formed through the meaning systems of social institutions. The social theorist Chris Shilling has argued that ‘conditions of high modernity have made the modern individual’s confrontation with death especially difficult... Death has become a particular existential problem for people as a result of modern forms of embodiment, rather than being a universal problem for human beings which assumes the same form irrespective of time or place’ (Shilling, C. (2003) *The Body and Social Theory*: 153). When once the occasion of death was once highly social, with public displays of mourning and events commonly taking place with the body of the deceased laid out to mark the occasion, now it is sequestered and privatised within institutions, and understood to be a problem for specialist knowledge and medical science. As the sociologist Norbert Elias observed, ‘never before have people died as noiselessly and hygienically as today... and never in social conditions fostering so much solitude’ (Elias, N. (1985) *The Loneliness of the Dying*: 85). Where once religion provided a ‘sacred canopy... a shared vision of the world, the body and self-identity’ (Shilling 2003: 154) the increasingly secularised formation of Western societies has marginalised the communal spaces for death that once anaesthetised dread about the meaningless of living in the face of the unknowable event of death.

The photographic medium is underwritten by death, in both the production and consumption of images across the contexts of art, science, commerce and personal photography, and in analysis of the histories and ontology of the



photograph. Deathly analogies and characterisations have riven considerations of the photograph since its inception in the mid-nineteenth century to today. From as early as 1840 when Hippolyte Bayard posed as a corpse in protest at the lack of recognition by the French government for his photogenic inventions, through to Andre Bazin who described photography as form of embalming life in his influential essay, 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image' (1960). Susan Sontag likened to the indexicality of the photograph to a death mask, writing 'all photographs are memento mori that enable participation in another's mortality' (Sontag, S. (1977) *On Photography*: 154). And more recently, historians such as Geoffrey Batchen (1999; 2004; 2009), Christian Metz (1985), Margaret Iversen (1994) and Audrey Linkman (2011) – to name a just a few – have all spoken of how the deathly qualities of photographs pose an uncanniness that might be seen as a return of the dead.

The strongest influence on the talk of death that circulates in ontological discussions about photography reverberates out of Roland Barthes's, *Camera Lucida*, (1980). In this text – arguably one of the cornerstones of contemporary photographic theory – Barthes has this to say:

'All those young photographers who are at work in the world, determined upon the capture of actuality, do not know they are agents of Death. This is the way in which our time assumes Death... For Death must be somewhere in society; if it is no longer (or less intently) in religion, it must be elsewhere; perhaps in this image which produces Death while trying to preserve life. Contemporary with the withdrawal of rites, Photography may correspond to the intrusion, in our modern society, of an asymbolic Death, outside of religion, outside of ritual, a kind of abrupt dive into literal Death. *Life / Death*: the paradigm is reduced to a simple click, the one separating the initial pose from the final print.'

Barthes stretches this death analogy throughout his meditation on the qualities of the photograph – written while in mourning for the death of his mother – leading a number of critics to attest it has produced an overbearing melancholic tone in much subsequent consideration of the photographic medium. He argues that the temporality peculiar to the photograph is best thought of as an expression of the tautology of the French grammatical term *future anterior*, which loosely translates as ‘That has been’. Photography is a past tense medium. As they can only ever be seen after the actual moment depicted, photographs will always intimate death.

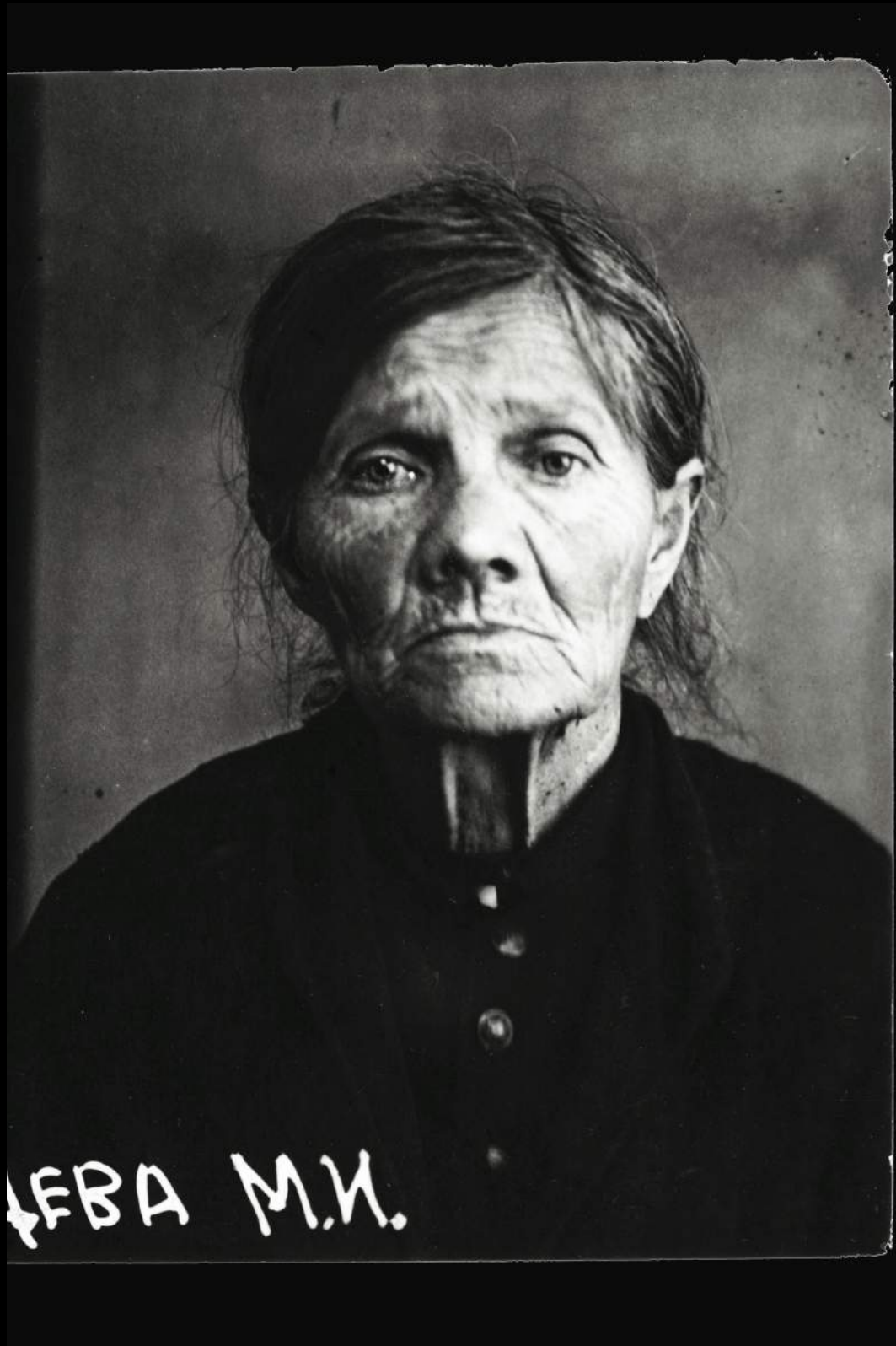
Barthes’s comments about the marginalisation of space for death are just as relevant to our conversation here. As society has become increasingly secularised since the mid-nineteenth century – corresponding to the arrival of the photographic medium – space for Death is now primarily carved out in various forms of production and consumption of photographic representation. Communal responses and collective rites and rituals for death, dying and mourning have been tidied away while the hunger to view representations of death and dying has grown: reality programmes set in accident and emergency departments, documentaries about war, websites set up as spaces for memorialisation, and exhibitions in art and photography galleries – not to mention the deluge of violent films and television series that has arisen in recent decades. The forces of consumption that drive the production of the spectacle of death in contemporary culture might be likened to a fissure that forges its way around a blockage, as public audiences continue to seek out systems and spaces to try to obtain knowledge of death.

So, how are we meant to view photographs of death when they are displayed in public? *Burden of Proof: The Construction of Visual Evidence* is an exhibition of images produced for very different contexts to the one in which they are now on show. The curator Diane Dufour contends this is an exhibition about the visual systems that gave rise to the production and articulation of the images – the product of professional practices of ‘evidence’

as constructed for the various quantitative purposes of judiciary systems. The crux of this is the interplay of a reliance on the image as documentation and the image as persuasion when tied to specific narratives, measurements, calculations, diagrams, testimonies or the architecture of a courtroom. While all photographs provide evidence of a sort – this happened then – the truth claims of the images in this exhibition are especially vulnerable when seen out of their original contexts. For as much as these images purport to show or reveal something about the act or effect of violent crime, it is what they lack that reveals both the ability and the ineptitude of images to harbour notions of truth.

As a consideration of the role of images in the construction of evidence, *Burden of Proof* – by stealth or design – appears to me to do just as much to provide space for death as it satiates a public desire to see and to try to know death. To view images of or about death may not necessarily get us any closer to the truth of death, but the sting of their temporality is acute as they evoke the deathly riddles of the ontology of the photograph.

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# *A Good Death*

## Angela Eden

Writing about Death in this digital age is different now than in the last few years. Then we had limited access to the business of dying and then only with our closest friends or family. Now, an endless stream of photos from around the world show us death and the dying. Invading our conscious world, we see barely covered corpses, limbs distorted, blurred outlines and human forms and 'remains'. Death is everywhere and nowhere, in another place but not here.

I wrote this poem thirty years ago, after witnessing an excruciating death in a hospital. Full of mechanics and little time or culture for emotional care. Despite some experienced and skilful nursing we were left, bereft.

### *A death*

*Death's a dirty business*

*At the worst of times*

*And this death took its time*

*While we waited*

*Wanting to be there*

*Wanting out*

*I had imagined dying*

*Peaceful, unblemished*

*Full of quiet moments*

*Gentle descent into sleep*

*This was full of rage*

*Full of disbelief*

*Eyes bewildered confused*

*Questioning the mess of it*

*Finally overstressed  
A face stretched  
A silent scream  
Anger charging the body rigid  
Till his heart broke*

*We the ones left  
Fell into each other  
Grateful for release  
For him, too much too long  
Enough*

*Thank god there is no god  
That planned this  
Disaster called  
A blessed relief*

*I now hold that rage  
That anger  
That all our science  
Had nothing for him  
Only our hands and eyes  
Buffering the violence  
Of the cruelty of death*

The poem is part of my experience of a 'bad' death, which makes me think about how we defend ourselves from the experience of dying, and the fear of being part of that moment.

Apart from our intimate relationships we mostly experience death of the 'other' as it happens in other places, defended from that pain by distance. In

our current multi-media world we can see grief held in a mother's posture and so we can mourn for her, but not for ourselves.

It makes me reflect on a notion of the time when were we more intimate with death and dying. I assume there were fewer hospitals, no ambulances, or carefully muted wards; only practical deeds and words. Death was present, as integral to the family, and unavoidable.

Our Unconscious builds a necessary defense to block the imagined pain, and helps us turn a blind eye to death. We are unwilling to let things die, and refuse to let death be alive in our conscious world.

Some of this can be traced to our reverence, a vestigial class reverence, for the medical industry. The professional training takes years to master the complexity of the subject, the level of detail and accuracy. The recognition of that skill and experience allows us to build an unconscious deification.

They are the ones that face death on our behalf. They cut out bits of our bodies, inject us with drugs anaesthetise us, and offer solutions to our body pain. No wonder we choose to respect their role and their power.

Only recently have we heard about the stress of the job. How the long hours and increasing budget restrictions increase illness and suicide, theirs and ours. Now we understand that they too are as frail as us. We are all defended against the reality of our own fragility.

Something in our current and defended western culture has lost a respect and a reverence for age. The really elderly are tucked away, sheltered by care into invisibility as we/they drift towards death.

As I write in October 2015, there is a flurry of news as UK is reported as having the best palliative care. It makes me re-think my perspective on how we face death, and rush to websites to re-examine my position.

“Palliative care is an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing the problem associated with life-threatening illness, through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification and impeccable assessment and treatment of pain and other problems, physical, psychosocial and spiritual.” (World Health Organization)

Have we now delegated this conversation about a good death to a specialised group of professionals? The ordinary-ness of death has been cloaked into invisibility. Maybe even disguised by a white coat.

So how then can we ask what is a ‘good’ death and develop a culture that talks of death before it arrives. We need to build a practice that includes the ability to talk about and face the truth about the future?

I wonder if the defense is not against dying but mourning. The ‘best’ deaths are with people who find a way to make the transition, in full consciousness and with awareness. Dying slowly after a full life, without regrets, is the hoped for way to go. Dying - unexpectedly, young, accidentally, or in pain - is dreaded most by those who are left.

So what is the place for analytic forensic work? I hope that preparing for death is part of understanding our personal history of death and mourning. I hope that by digging into and past our defenses any future death will be contained. There is, I believe, an intimacy in being close to death and a consciousness of ending that can be full of living.

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# *Death, Beliefs and Respect*

## Philip Stokoe

On Christmas day 1964 the most important man in my life, my grandad, died. On 25<sup>th</sup> of September 1965 my younger brother died. Halfway between these two events I turned 14.

One very close friend of mine died when I was 43 and another less than a year ago. The most important man in my life, my dad, is 90. Whether through these experiences or a bizarre quirk in my nature that requires me to face reality, now that I'm now 64, I find I spend a significant amount of my time thinking about death.

For many years, desperate to believe it does not all end when we die, I sought evidence for a spiritual existence after death, and for God that would enable this, but I didn't find either.

Many people want to believe in a superior being who has a particular interest in them personally, because they can't cope with the idea that there is no God and no afterlife. They think it would mean two things; that there is no constraint or restraint on you – so you can do whatever you like, and that this must inevitably leave you unbearably depressed.

So far as the former is concerned, I have tried very hard to live a life without restraint, one in which I can indulge my 'Id impulses'. I have to report failure in this regard; in spite of every effort, I find myself concerned about other people's feelings, vulnerabilities or pain. It turns out that those things described as ethics or morals exist even without the pompous claim made by some organised religions seem to make - that without their strictures about human behaviour, anarchy would rule. In fact observations of so-called primitive societies seem to demonstrate that cooperation and mutual respect are the features that make them work.

The second assumption believers make about life without a God is that it is depressed. My own experience is the exact opposite; the knowledge that this is all there is increases my motivation to get the most out of life.

Having escaped from the thrall of an omnipotent God, I have become aware of something much more 'anti-life' than an absence of a belief in a God, and that is the presence of 'beliefs' of the kind that are taken to be 'facts'. I really am not objecting here to everyday beliefs; the way I see it is that we hold beliefs as a kind of temporary state of mind until we have tested them to find how true they are. We can't think of them as facts because they have not been fully tested yet. What disturbs me are those beliefs that Ron Britton described as 'unconscious' beliefs. If we are aware of them at all, we think of them simply as facts of life. These beliefs, held by a single person, can be evaluated by others and rejected or accepted. It is when groups of people come to share the same unconscious beliefs that things can become dangerous. A single individual who claims as a statement of fact that communists are plotting to destroy his way of life will probably be recognised as having a mental health problem, but when such an individual gathers around him a whole group of people who share the same view, it is called McCarthyism and is extremely dangerous.

Wilfred Bion has shown us that the usual interpretation of Descartes' 'cogito ergo sum', namely that thinking is natural to human beings was wrong, and that far from being innate, it is a skill that needs to be acquired and requires effort to maintain. Under pressure, when anxiety is high, we all of us collapse into a fundamentalist state of mind in which everything is sharply divided between right and wrong or good and bad. In this state of mind certainty becomes admirable, and thinking (which is predicated on not knowing) is denigrated. This is the state of mind that looks for beliefs that can be treated as facts.



Since Margaret Thatcher's time, we have been fed a belief that the less fortunate in our society are scroungers, lazy people looking to steal from those who are better off. Our current government have been pushing the same idea.

The trouble with this idea is that it focuses on material acquisitions - money and possessions. The idea of somebody taking from us something that we value immediately conjures anxiety, which pushes us into the fundamentalist state of mind I referred to earlier. One of the effects this produces is that we are distracted from examining our own emotional experience in the face of generosity. When we hear stories of other people's generosity, it gives us a good feeling. The same is true when we ourselves are able to be generous; it makes us feel better. It seems to me that an essential characteristic of a civilised society is the creation of a community, which looks after those who are needy. This characteristic makes for a dignified society; we lose dignity when we turn the needy within our society into bad people unworthy of our concern.

We are at a critical point in the history of social Britain; successive governments, building on a fear of welfare scroungers, have been destroying that amazing thing created after the Second World War which, even at a time when the country was in enormous debt, gave us dignity - the welfare state. The moment we fall for the trick that measures love, concern and compassion in financial terms, we have lost dignity and our claim to humanity.

The death that I am most concerned about today is the death of our compassionate state. This death is not necessary, this death is artificially contrived, this death is murder.

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# *In the Shadow of the Object*

Tom DeRose

In Part 3 of László Krasznahorkai's novel *Satantango*, entitled 'To Know Something', we are introduced to a character called the doctor, whose existence seems to be wholly structured around obsessive routines to the extent that he has become completely devitalised. He sits by the window and watches and records the actions of every individual who comes into his field of vision. In order to facilitate this endless stream of observation and cataloguing, the doctor has,

‘collected and arranged, in an optimal fashion, all that was necessary for eating, drinking, smoking, daily writing and reading, as well as the countless other necessary details of everyday life.’

If, ‘one matchstick or brandy glass’ is out of place, ‘chaos would ensue and all would be lost’.

For a reader of Freud, these words will no doubt conjure up associations around his famous case study *The Rat Man* (Notes upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis). The doctor's researches betray a fascination with the ‘sexual instinct of looking and knowing’ (scopophilia and epistemophilia), which Freud suggests are developed early and subsequently repressed by Obsessive Neurotics.

By permanently fixing the objects surrounding him, and thus denying the possibility of contingency, the doctor poses what for Psychoanalyst Serge Leclair is *the* Obsessive Neurotic question, ‘am I alive or dead?’ or alternatively ‘am I subject or object?’ We can interpret the doctor's behaviour as an attempt to answer these questions; by ‘freezing becoming’ the doctor has created a state of eternal presence, in which time is spatialised and death is at

once affirmed and denied. Like T. S. Eliot's Prufrock, the doctor has 'measured out my life in coffee spoons'.

The Obsessive Neurotic then creates a death-in-life, in order to defend himself from chaos, a state in which people and things alike are composed (but not *decomposed*) in to a protective constellation. In this constellation each element is first defined and then ordered, and it is only then that the defence can operate effectively. Death and chaos then appear to be intrinsically related.

How then can we understand death? How can we represent the unrepresentable? The objects in the doctor's study, like photographs of cadavers, are merely place-holders, signposts to something that is fundamentally other; to absence. There is no place for death in the Freudian unconscious. As experiencing beings, death can only be conceptualised against the bedrock of our own castration (we experience the death of others as it affects us, not as the thing itself). When the 'death instinct' finally enters the Freudian theatre in 1920, it appears as a speculative concept, empty of content, which seeks the organism's return to the inorganic; singing, as it were, from the wings rather than from centre stage.

It is perhaps, by looking in more detail at the state of chaos, that we can help to gain a closer insight in to the elusive concept of death. In Freud's paper *Mourning and Melancholia* (1915), there are some clues that can help us elucidate this relationship. Here, Freud argues that the difference between the 'normal' state of mourning and the 'pathological' state of melancholia is that in the former state the ego mourns the loss of a known object (a loved one perhaps), whereas in the latter state the mourned object is unconscious; we may know whom we are mourning, but not 'what we have lost'. Drawing on the conceptual apparatus he developed in his 1914 paper *On Narcissism*, Freud suggests that the critical agency (which would later become the super-ego) identifies the ego with the lost object, and this results in the 'self-accusations,

and the 'depletion of the ego' which are so prevalent in the state of melancholia. In this way, 'the shadow of the object falls over the ego'. What is hinted at then in Freud's account of the mechanism of melancholia is the production of a state, which replicates the earliest stage of psychic development, a stage of indifferntiation between the ego and its future objects.

The English word 'chaos' is curiously ambiguous. It can evoke a feeling of frantic aimless activity, but it can also suggest formlessness and indifferntiation. For Milton in Book One of *Paradise Lost*, Chaos is that from which the 'Heavens and Earth' arose. That it precedes the very first separation (in psychoanalytic terms the separation between ego and object) is, I think, crucial in our attempt to approach an understanding of death through the concept of chaos.

The doctor's obsessive practices in *Satantango* can be seen as an attempt to uphold separation in the face of chaos, however in Freud's conception of melancholia, the boundary, which has upheld this separation (between ego and object) has collapsed. The collapsing of this boundary is explored by Lars Von Trier in his film *Melancholia*, in which he presents two parallel narratives; one the account of a woman's severe depression, and the other the slow and inexorable approach of a mysterious planet called Melancholia. Justine (the main character) is indifferent to the objects that surround her (her fiancé, her family, and finally to her favourite horse which she mercilessly beats when it refuses to move), and it appears as if she herself is pulling the planet towards the earth, with which it eventually collides, bringing death.

In the opening scene of *Melancholia*, Von Trier hints at the seductive pull that exerts itself on the ego, as the two planets collide in an eroticised fusion, like the siren song pulling Odysseus towards the rocks. Julia Kristeva, in her book *Black Sun* writes that the melancholic is not mourning an object but the

‘Thing’, or ‘the real that does not lend itself to signification, the centre of attraction and repulsion, seat of sexuality from which the object of desire will be separated’. Here I believe we come close to a definition of the chaos against which our doctor is defending himself with his frozen world, and which the melancholic is enticed towards.

How then are we to steer a course between the Scylla of fusion with the seductive ‘Thing’ and the Charybdis of the Obsessive’s defence? This is the self-appointed task of Psychoanalysis- the ‘talking cure’ which states as its objective the reanimation of the subject through the desire-producing power of language; or, more succinctly; ‘to get her to speak’.

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# *The Scene of the Crime*

## Elizabeth Cotton

This was not the piece about death I was planning on writing. It was supposed to be a turn on Hauntology and listening to the Smiths. A pretty piece skirting around death, a riff on our obsession with the 1980s, mourning and a neat segue into the impact of economic depression.

And then Paris happened.

Like many people of an artistic persuasion, on Friday 13th November I'd travelled for Paris Photo, and to meet my twin sister who was visiting from NYC to launch her new book. A visit to Collette and a binge on Fruits de Mer. Literally magic.

On Friday we'd shopped on Rue de Charonne and went for dinner just round the corner. Since we were off the pop we walked home early, stopping outside La Belle Equipe to breath in the lovely young folk, and joked that if we still drank we'd be at the bar hoping that their beauty would rub off. Ten minutes later we heard that 19 people had been killed there.

In just ten minutes my mind had become the scene of a crime.

## Fragments

I'm left with fragments, unable to pull them or myself together.

An American curator, and much loved x-colleague, catches us taking pictures of cakes just off the Bastille, before the shootings take place. An intense exchange about politics, class and sexism. How to help her two teenage daughters navigate a school of angry porn addicted boys. How to stop men

trolling my sister and hiding behind their beards. A fierce conversation between women of substance.

The sounds of sirens for 5 hours into the night. Realisation dawning.

The face of a beautiful young black woman singing at La Belle Equipe.

A tearful conversation with our parents, steadying them for a night of worry ahead.

A Paris guide book on the table, page marked for music venues.

Saturday morning watching my sister dip into a bag of magic tricks and put on her make up before we venture out to find food. She looks disapprovingly at my outfit tutting that I can't make it into the shower. I remind her that in every photograph of her since the age of 3 she carries a handbag full of very important things. Has ever been the way.

The butcher's on Saturday. A familiar Grand Madame unwilling to confirm or deny the system for getting served. Her assistant who made me taste everything before purchase, nudging me towards the Lapin en Croute. Safety in the old ways. Everything tastes of metal.

The immaculate American couple in their 60s in a Marais cafe, complaining about the table and bitching about the art world. She has not eaten for several decades and he is gay. They order foie gras and chips. A sudden rush to be reunited with the body.

Late night tears, the infant fear of the lights going out. My twin cheers me with a discussion about Tenko - the 1980s series about women in a Japanese prison of war camp. We remember the character we loved who died trying to get a lipstick so she could kiss a man. We believed profoundly that she wanted

the lipstick more than the man. I asked Charlotte how many lipsticks she had. She had four and listed them in order of preference. I asked her if we had to choose between food and lipstick which would it be. She thoughtfully answered that she would need to keep all of them except the new lipgloss that makes her lips sore. I cherished every single serious word she said like a bedtime story.

Then the hardest part, saying goodbye to Paris and each other. A young photographer stops my sister as we walk through Gare du Nord. Her gentle response at his ambition compelling him to apologetically network amongst the devastation. She touches his arm and asks him if he's OK. I am filled with pride at her kindness.

### Twinning as Defence

For many of us the shock of Paris returns us to a place of trauma and feelings that we fashion our whole lives to avoid. Whether through intellectualisations or art, knowledge or a religious belief in our school of thought, we all try to keep away from staring into the existential abyss. Overwhelmed by the insecurity of life and the certainty of death.

Twinning in this sense is a psychic defence. A union of the same, a panic room safe from the reality of actual human relationships with other different and separate people. A fantasy of two being one, names get exchanged and subjectivity at best ambiguous.

This twinning can be of great comfort to the people involved and the witnesses of their idyllic state. Always there to protect each other from the hard facts of life. That we are different and alone, and that we all die.

One of the hardest things about being a twin is the thought of how to live without each other. Inevitably at some point one of you will lose your twin -

whether through the organic process of growing up and separating or a more dramatic tearing. I remember an early unspoken dialogue with my twin, how to live without each other. Please let me go first.

I write these words as if they are just Sudoku, a puzzle to be solved. But the loss of my twin poses a deep existential crisis. How can there be life with death when you are a twin?

### My Internal Terrorist

In response to this unanswered question, over the days that follow the 13th November the rage that explodes in me is hard to contain. What Bion calls the 'chaos monster' was unleashed.

The rage at my own vulnerability making me psychically violent. An internal terrorist not interested in the dynamic world of human life, instead everything reduced to black and white.

My BFF Thanatos and the seduction of a Nirvana fantasy offering a final solution to fear.

Many of us on the left hide behind our ideological or intellectual defences, and retreat into a religiosity and righteousness. This is a state of mind where beliefs become facts, combined with our sadistic superegos which demand we save the world. It is at this point that being right turns into being self-righteous.

When something like Paris shocks the world, we can be so afraid of our own vulnerability that we become a martyr to the cause. These defences turn the world into black and white, them's and us's - denying the reality that violence threatens our links to each other making us profoundly alone.

## Brothers and Sisters

Anxiety can do bad stuff to people. For many of us it is a return to a traumatised state where mind is separated from body. Connections and links are broken and the world gets split into good and bad. An entire work life devoted to solidarity and the good deeds of the left and I don't care about anyone except my twin.

And then seven days later, my love for psychoanalysis kicks in. For many people psychoanalysis is not an intellectual defence, rather an emancipatory practice, that gets stuck into the blood and guts of overthrowing my internal terrorist. The part of me that wants to destroy anything that does not share my exact DNA.

Psychoanalysis has given me a 'third' position that frees me from this binary monochrome world. Quite unexpectedly and uncharacteristically, I feel gratitude to my analyst. The many years wrestling with psychoanalytic ideas and a painful process of development has, despite my defiance in the face of change, taken place. It is this that now comes into play, helping me maintain myself - psychically and emotionally - even in the face of great loss.

I celebrate my newfound adulthood by no longer referring to my analyst as The Butcher, and calling him by his actual name. Just a man who took the time to help me see the parts of myself that I could not bear to do alone.

The process of living a full life requires us to accept some facts of life which include our separateness from others and our own mortality. It also includes the painful knowledge that we are inevitably dependent on the people around us. People who are not like us, not our twin, who are not perfectly attuned to our needs.

In a context of violence, one of the great seductions is to believe that we are united in our trauma. Our actual experience can be that when the balance tips in favour of fear our relationships easily break down. Betrayals, mistakes and withdrawal from the people we love, our wounds sometimes too deep for the other to get close.

This traumatic reality presents us with a massive dilemma. How to stay connected to the people around us when everything in us wants to run screaming into the hills?

Solidarity is not a union of like minded folk who would never hurt each other. Solidarity as an ideal exists precisely because we are all capable of acting defensively and against our own human interests. In a context of violence, if there is a fight to be had it is a psychological one. To continue to take the risk of practicing solidarity by making contact with other people who are not the same as us. A relational model of solidarity.

Sometimes the very best we can do is to be just human amongst other humans. Sisters and brothers, but not twins.

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